

# BARRIER ANALYSIS FOR THE SOCIAL-ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF REFUGEE POPULATION AND HOST COMMUNITIES IN ARMENIA



Photo caption by WFP  
Refugee family in Goris having hot meals, September

*Report, February 2024*



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## Foreword and acknowledgements

This report provides an analysis of a qualitative study conducted in December 2023. The data collection and analysis were conducted by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) team.

WFP Armenia country office expresses its gratitude to the representatives of local self-governance bodies of consolidated communities of Artashat, Ararat, Masis, Sisian, Goris, Vardenis, Martuni (in Gegharkunik province, Armenia) Sevan, Hrazdan, Charentsavan, Nor Hachn, Tashir and Vanadzor.

WFP team is grateful to refugees and local populations in target communities who participated in focus group discussions.

## Affirmation

Except as acknowledged by the references in this document to other authors and publications, the report enclosed herein consists of the work undertaken in compliance with World Food Programme Guidelines.

Data collected throughout the assessment process remains the property of WFP. Information and data are used with the participants' consent.

Quotations from interviewed community members in this report are the opinions of private individuals. While this feedback is used to inform programme design with the aim of improving social cohesion, these quotes are not attributable to WFP nor do they represent the organisation's stance.

This report makes reference to the Region formerly known as Nagorno Karabakh (NK), now 'Karabakh Region'.

## Executive summary

On 19 September 2023, hostilities resulted in large numbers of ethnic Armenians fleeing into Armenia. Currently, about 101,800 refugees reside in different regions of Armenia, settling mainly in central areas of the country. Extensive humanitarian assistance was provided by the Government and international and non-governmental organizations to address the immediate needs.

In addition to humanitarian assistance, dedicated efforts towards social-economic integration are also needed to support the refugees to improve their livelihoods, build their resilience and ensure equal opportunities and community development for local communities.

WFP commissioned a qualitative study to generate evidence on the potential barriers hindering the socio-economic integration of refugee populations in host communities as well as to identify existing opportunities to organize and establish sustainable livelihoods for refugee and local populations.

The study was carried out in the regions of Kotayk, Ararat, Gegharkunik, Lori and Syunik, i.e., bordering, poor regions and the ones where big numbers of refugee population has resided. Desk reviews of official sources and available analytical reports, 13 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with key informants, 13 focus group discussions (FGDs) with refugees and 5 FGDs were conducted with local populations in the targeted regions. In total, 13 key informants, 162 refugees and 50 local people participated in the study.

The findings of the study are grouped into several thematic sections.

### *Legal status and documentation*

In October 2023, the Government of Armenia issued a Decree granting temporary protection to individuals arriving in the September influx. This decree also allows the displaced to apply for Armenian citizenship. However, despite this provision, the lack of clarity regarding legal status remains a significant barrier for socio-economic integration. One key challenge is the difficulties in understanding the advantages and disadvantages for example if obtaining refugee status precludes Armenian citizenship. Additionally, there is a notable lack of awareness about the processes and procedures involved in acquiring either status. Furthermore, many displaced face difficulties due to missing documents necessary to access pensions and other state benefits they in principle are entitled to.

### *Intentions to stay or leave current places of residence*

Since the first day of displacement, frequent movements of refugees were seen from one region to another. As per the latest data, the highest numbers are registered in central areas of Armenia, such as Yerevan, Kotayk and Ararat regions. Many refugees express an intention to remain in their current communities until spring. A significant factor influencing their choice of residence is the presence of relatives, which represents a valuable social capital. Refugees tend to avoid settling in bordering areas and instead prefer to remain in communities where they resided during their displacement in 2020. Additionally, the affordability of housing rent and overall cost of living are important considerations for refugees in selecting permanent residence. Refugees show preference for areas near Yerevan, as the capital city offers diverse income opportunities and strong infrastructure.

### *Social integration and human capital*

A significant obstacle to refugees' social integration is the limited communication both among refugees themselves and with local people. Specifically, refugees tend to avoid actively engaging with local communities, which may lead to missed opportunities for relationship building and integration. Both key informants and local people point out the fragility of social cohesion, because of different factors, such as a) the extensive assistance provided to refugees and leaving the vulnerable local population behind b) the disagreement of refugees on existing salary levels in Armenia, c) prioritization of refugees by employers over local population.

The main positive aspects for social integration are a) the welcoming and supportive attitude and behavior of local population toward refugees, b) readiness of both refugees and local populations to cooperate, c) the

inflow of refugees provides the villages/ communities with new opportunities for renewing cultural and socio-economic activities contributing to community development.

Consolidation efforts are needed to build the social integration and mitigate risks of tensions in communities.

### ***Services and access to information***

Refugees in Armenia express frustration with bureaucratic processes that they find more cumbersome than those they experienced before leaving. The delays in providing solutions exacerbate this dissatisfaction, leading to a sense of being deceived and fostering mistrust towards the government and the country. A notable challenge is the unfamiliarity of the refugee population with online tools and systems necessary for accessing state social assistance programs, further impeding the timely receipt of support.

While community-based services are generally perceived as accessible, some communities face limitations in accessing pre-school education due to inadequate buildings and facilities. Moreover, insufficient public transport in certain areas hampers rural children's access to clubs or services in urban areas.

Local authorities often lack the legal mechanisms to adequately address the diverse needs of refugees, highlighting a gap in support structures. Enhancing communication between authorities and refugees, improving access to online resources, and investing in infrastructure for education and transportation are essential steps to mitigate these challenges and promote the integration and well-being of refugees in Armenia.

### ***Employment opportunities and economic integration***

Refugees in Armenia rely primarily on state social assistance, savings, and occasional daily job opportunities for livelihoods. However, they often deplete their savings to meet basic needs like housing and winterization essentials. Financial institutions' refusal to grant loans due to incomplete documents and unstable income poses a significant barrier to accessing financial services. Additionally, refugees face uncertainty and past displacement experiences, hindering investments and income-generating activities.

Land fragmentation in Armenia makes it challenging for refugees to access agricultural opportunities, requiring them to approach multiple landowners to consolidate rented plots.

Concerns about investing in rented land and the risk of losing it further deter agricultural pursuits. The land fragmentation and the loss of pastures is also a challenge for the local population.

Climate and soil quality differences between refugee's place of origin and Armenia also impact agricultural viability and rentability.

Limited public transportation inhibits refugees' access to job opportunities, exacerbating challenges related to lower wages in Armenia compared to their place of origin. Furthermore, documentation issues, particularly missing military certificates for male refugees, restrict employment prospects, especially in the armed forces.

Refugees' potential and skillset can be useful. Agriculture is the primary area identified by refugees themselves as a potential livelihood. Those who used to be employed in public or private entities were also engaged in either horticulture or animal husbandry which was sometimes their secondary source of income. Most of the men were engaged in military service. Their attitudes and opportunities to engage in other types of income generating activities are limited. However, many refugees are motivated to work and engage in income-generating activities.

The main issues for sustainable farming, agricultural production and income generation raised by local population include lack of knowledge and skills on doing business, lack of agricultural equipment, irrigation issues, as well as finding potential markets for selling agricultural products.

### ***Recommendations and action points***

Based on the findings, the following recommendations and action points are drawn:

#### *Legal Status and Documentation*

- Develop awareness raising campaigns and sensitization to educate refugees and relevant representatives of local authorities on the procedures and process of obtaining refugee status and Armenian citizenship, as well as the opportunities gained.
- Simplify and streamline processes for acquiring legal status, ensuring clear guidance and support for document provision.

#### *Intentions to Stay or Leave Current Places of Residence*

- Develop community-based support programs tailored to the needs of refugees and the local population, fostering social cohesion and integration.
- Provide housing support initiatives to alleviate financial burdens and facilitate stable residency for refugees.

#### *Social Integration and Human Capital*

- Implement cross-cultural communication initiatives to encourage interaction and understanding between refugees and local communities.
- Integrate refugees in formal and non-formal structures fostering integration.
- Mitigate the threats towards social cohesion, such as the effective coordination and inclusiveness of humanitarian assistance and development investments.

#### *Services and Access to Information*

- Enhance the communication between the authorities and refugees by establishing coordination committees consisting of local authority and refugees aiming at provision of information, referral, etc.

- Improve access to information by providing training and resources on using online tools and systems for state social assistance programs.

#### *Employment Opportunities and Economic Integration*

- Establish microfinance and subsidy programs tailored to the needs of refugees and local population, providing financial assistance for entrepreneurial ventures and small businesses.
- Design micro-finance programmes to fund businesses and enterprises newly established by refugees with reduced interest rates and taxes.
- Develop initiatives to address land fragmentation and infrastructure issues, such as facilitating access to consolidated land plots for agricultural activities, installation of irrigation systems, greenhouses, etc. for refugees and local population.
- Contribute to sustainable farming, by creating community-owned assets and services, such as the establishment of equipment parks, effective value chain actors, consultancy, etc.
- Map the existing opportunities, projects, required workforce and the potential for refugees, and accordingly develop a systematic approach for employment and self-employment programs.

#### *Comprehensive efforts for socio-economic integration*

- Strengthen coordination and collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and local authorities to ensure comprehensive support for refugees.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of integration programs regularly, adjusting strategies based on feedback and evolving needs.
- Foster community-driven initiatives and partnerships to promote social integration and mitigate tensions between refugees and the local population.

## Background

Supply issues in the Lachin area since December 2022 resulted in a significant shortage of essential supplies (food, fuel, vital medical treatment, and healthcare) for a population of 120,000, including 30,000 children in the region.

According to the Rapid Need Assessment conducted by Artsakh Hub in August 2023 11% of households reported that adult members only had one meal and 35% had two meals on average because of acute food shortage.

Additionally, 65% of the population had partially sufficient and 30% insufficient food during the preceding 7 days of the interviews indicating “no food in the market” as the main reason because of supply issues.

Subsequently, 68% of the households reported reduction of number of meals eaten in a day, 51% relied on less preferred and less expensive food, 38% restricted consumption by adults for small children to eat and 36% limited portion size at meals to be able to cope with growing food shortage.



Photo caption by WFP  
Refugee child in Goris in WFP mobile storage unit, September

On September 19, 2023, hostilities resulted in large numbers of ethnic Armenians fleeing into Armenia. Currently, about 101,000 refugees reside in different regions of Armenia.

The displacement has significant effects on the situation in Armenia. To be able to address the consequences, it is important to analyze both the positive and negative implications for different sectors, including economic, social, infrastructure and social cohesion.

The displacement is expected to put additional economic burden on the Government of Armenia, as it will likely need to allocate resources for shelter, food, healthcare, education, and other essential services for the refugees. On the other hand, refugees can participate in the local labour market, potentially filling gaps in the workforce and strengthening the competition for jobs. Also, they may start businesses or contribute to the local economic development through other entrepreneurial activities.

The United Nations Inter-Agency Rapid Needs Assessment<sup>1</sup> conducted shortly after the displacement showed that many refugees were expected to remain in Armenia, and there was a need to prioritize resilience addressing the needs of both refugees and host communities. The pressing concerns were seen in the areas of employment, essential infrastructure, and legal support. One of the main findings was that the employment support and job placement were among the most requested services at the community level.

### Objective and methodology

Upon the arrival of refugees, the Government conducted rapid needs registration. Another round of needs registration was conducted by the communities and the Territorial Centers of the Unified Social Service. An Interagency rapid needs assessment was also conducted at regional and community levels. All these assessments were focusing on basic needs of refugees to design and plan the immediate response; thus, they didn't explore the intentions, barriers and the potential integration opportunities for refugee households.

Conducting a barrier and potential analysis is a crucial step for WFP and other stakeholders when planning livelihood and resilience building assistance programs for refugee population, therefore ensuring that these are well-informed, context-specific, and effective in supporting the refugees' self-reliance and resilience. This approach can contribute to designing inclusive activities enhancing social cohesion, self-sustaining livelihoods, and integration.

The assessment aimed to explore the **potential barriers** that hinder the socio-economic integration of refugee population in the hosting communities as well as will reveal **existing opportunities** to organize and establish sustainable livelihoods for refugee population.

The document informed the design of future activities and projects integrating all the peculiarities of the population of interest to make interventions human-centric and needs-driven. The assessment aims to inform programme design promoting social cohesion and integration - thereby equal opportunities for "vulnerable" people.

The main objectives of the analysis are:

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<sup>1</sup> [Document - Rapid Needs Assessment 3 November 2023 \(unhcr.org\)](#)



- a) To assess multidimensional potential of refugee and local population and existing opportunities in host communities to understand the prospects of social and economic integration of the population of interest.
- b) Assess the social and economic barriers the refugee and local population face in host communities hindering their socio-economic integration as well as draw the paths contributing to smooth and mutually beneficial community cohesion.
- c) Inform the decisions of potential interventions and designs of future programs that aim to support socio-economic integration of refugee population in host communities, promote social cohesion and resilience building projects implemented by WFP and other partners/stakeholders.

The analysis was carried out in the regions of **Kotayk, Ararat, Gegharkunik, Lori** and **Syunik**, i.e., bordering, poor regions and the ones where the largest numbers of refugee population has resided.

Secondary data collection was conducted via desk review of relevant documents and statistics related to socio-economic conditions of the target regions and was reflected in this report.

The methods of primarily qualitative data collection such as **focus group discussions** and **key informant interviews** were applied.

Table 1: List of regions, consolidated communities and settlements included in the study.

Region	Community	FGD with refugees (Settlement)	KII	FGDs with local people (Settlement)
<b>Syunik</b>	Sisian	Sisian	Sisian	Verishen
	Goris	Verishen	Goris	
<b>Gegharkunik</b>	Vardenis	Vardenis	Vardenis	Vaghashen
	Martuni (ARM)	Vaghashen	Martuni (ARM)	
	Sevan	Lchashen	Sevan	
<b>Kotayk</b>	Hrazdan	Hrazdan	Hrazdan	Arzakan
	Charentsavan	Arzakan	Charentsavan	
	Nor Hachn	Nor Geghi	Nor Hachn	
<b>Lori</b>	Tashir	Metsavan	Tashir	Metsavan
	Vanadzor	Gugark	Vanadzor	
<b>Ararat</b>	Artashat	Mkhchyan	Artashat	Mkhchyan
	Masis	Ranchpar	Masis	
	Ararat	Noyakert	Ararat	

### **Key Informant interviews (KII)**

In total, 13 semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with the respective representatives of local government who were adequately aware about social and economic development prospects in the area, and with the designated specialists for refugee affairs in the communities. In most cases more than one representative from local government participated in the interview which helped extract more comprehensive information. The interviews aimed at exploring socio-economic conditions in the hosting communities, development opportunities and obstacles and how the key informants see the integration processes of the refugees in their communities in this context.

### ***Focus group discussions (FGD)***

Focus group discussions with local and refugee population were conducted separately to have homogenous groups for sampling and let the participants express their opinions freely.

#### *Focus group discussions with refugees*

13 focus group discussions were conducted with the refugee population located in 3 urban and 10 rural settlements of 5 targeted regions of Armenia. Since it was challenging to identify certain profiles or characteristics of refugee people, those who approached local authorities for the support in finding income-generating opportunities or demonstrated willingness and motivation to integrate in society were targeted for the assessment.

#### *Focus group discussions with local population*

5 FGDs were separately conducted with local population in the targeted regions of the assessment. FGDs with locals intended to uncover the position and role of local people in the integration process of refugees. As the assessment aims at understanding social cohesion issues that may arise after the influx of the refugees into Armenia the views of local people were considered valuable to incorporate.

#### *Tools*

Question-guides for focus group discussions with both local and refugee population were developed aiming at retrieving information related to the sub questions of the assessment.

For the semi-structured interviews, the questions were also prepared in advance. Both KIIs and FGDs were conducted face-to-face.

Demographic data was collected through specially prepared quantitative questionnaires including a limited number of questions primarily related to age, gender, housing, and urgent needs. Those questionnaires were printed and distributed to the FGD participants to fill in. The data was gathered, analyzed, and is presented in the report.

One moderator and one note-taker facilitated the discussions.



Photo caption by WFP  
Refugee participants of FGD in Nor Geghi, December 2023

## Findings

This section presents the main findings of the assessment. The report includes the findings of the desk review of different sources, including official documents, news releases, reports, etc., as well as the results of FGD with refugees and local population, and key informant interviews.

### Demographics

The demographic information was collected via key informant interviews, as well as self-administered short questionnaires filled in by refugee and local participants of FGDs.

Table 2: Number of refugee families located in the communities reported by the key informants as of assessment period (December 2023)

Community	Number of refugee families
Ararat	320
Artashat	1200
Charentsavan	815
Hrazdan	1140
Martuni (ARM)	175
Nor Hachn	500
Masis	2100
Tashir	301
Vardenis	200
Goris	400
Sevan	423
Vanadzor	800
Sisian	230
<b>Total</b>	<b>8604</b>

Speaking about the profiles of those families most of the key informants indicated **multi-member families** residing in their communities. However, the number of families with a disabled member and elderlies is also comparatively big. One of the distinct characteristics of the refugee households noticed by the key informants and local people is having many children (more than 4 children in a family).

According to the key informants, refugees who came from urban areas mostly try to settle in towns of Armenia with typical urban features. Similarly, rural population strives to reside in the villages to be able to engage in rural-specific activities.

#### *Profiles of the refugee participants*

The total number of refugee participants in FGDs was **162** which means that on average there were 12 participants in each FGD. 47 percent of the participants were female while 53 percent - male. The average age of the participants was 44. The average number of household members was 5 while the average number of people at working age in a household was 2 (by working age it was meant people above 16).

86 percent of the refugees in FGDs indicated that the gender of their household head was male, while 13 percent said it was female. For 2 percent of the participants, it was difficult to answer this question. 57 percent of refugees indicated living in a separate house, 27 percent in a temporary

shelter and 19 percent in multi-apartment houses. 5 percent mentioned that the house they were living in was their own.

78 percent of refugees said that they were living with their families only, 19 percent stated living with their relatives, while 5 percent – with host families. 95 percent of refugees participating in FGDs mentioned having no property (real estate or a soil plot) in Armenia while 5 percent said they had. 81 percent of the refugees said they had cooking facilities while 19 percent indicated no cooking facilities in their living areas. 66 percent of refugees reported having food storing facilities while 34 percent mentioned having no food storage amenities in their houses.

Among 3 most urgent needs specified by the refugees, **household supplies** (fridge, stove, oven, TV, washing machine, etc.) comprised 73 percent, **employment** was 47 percent and **furniture** (sofa, table, chairs, bed, etc.) was 44 percent.

### *Profiles of the local participants*

The number of participants of FGDs with locals was 40 which means that the average number of participants in each FGD was 8. Female participants comprised 48 percent while males counted to be 52 percent of the local participants. The average age of the participants was 48 years, the average number of family members – 4.9. The average number of family members at working age was 3. Among the participants 67 percent mentioned that their household head is male, 30 percent stated it is female and for 3 percent it was difficult to answer. 23 percent of the respondents said they live in a multi-apartment building while 77 percent mentioned separate houses. 80 percent of the participants stated the house they live in is their own while 20 percent said it is not theirs. 97 percent of local respondents stated they have both cooking and food storage facilities in their houses.

### **Legal status and documentation**

In October 26 the Government of Armenia accepted a Decree<sup>2</sup> on granting temporary protection to the displaced persons. It has declared its intention to grant refugee status and Armenian citizenship to ethnic Armenian refugees who arrived in September 2023 upon request. As announced the refugee status<sup>3</sup> given to these Armenians is going to be temporary. It will be given for one year in the beginning, with a possibility of extension.

*Box 1: A "refugee" is a foreign citizen who, motivated by a reasonable fear of persecution, is outside the borders of his or her home country. Asylum seekers and refugees, while exercising their rights defined by Law, shall respect the laws of the Republic of Armenia, the legitimate interests, rights, and freedoms of the citizens of Armenia and other persons, and maintain public order and the security of the Republic of Armenia.*

Once the term of the status ends, the refugees would need to apply for Armenian citizenship. Subsequently, conscription procedures will be conducted in accordance with the Armenian laws.

The Government's explanation for issuing Armenian passports to these refugees is that since 1999 the passports with the code "070" had been issued as "travel documents" without granting citizenship. Those passports were to ensure that the displaced residents

<sup>2</sup>[arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=184503](https://arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=184503), *Unofficial translation: 6545233b4.pdf* (refworld.org)

<sup>3</sup> [Armenia – A Country Providing Asylum \(migration.am\)](https://migration.am)

can travel to and from their region of origin. The Armenian government expressed similar position in the European Court.

According to the Ministry of Labour and Social affairs (MLSA), the Government received 42,809 people applied for temporary protection in Armenia as of January 25, and the majority of applicants were granted the status. Only 900 persons (0.8%) have applied to acquire Armenian citizenship.

On 26 December, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA) presented the details regarding the procedures for paying pensions and allowances to displaced people<sup>4</sup>. The allowance will be calculated starting from October 1, and will be applied retroactively. Accordingly, the allowances accumulated for the period until December 31 will be received all at once. The applications are accepted online through the online.ssa.am platform.

Based on FGDs, one of the obstacles for the inclusion of refugees is the unclarity related to their **legal status** in the Republic of Armenia as well as the processes and procedures preceding the acquisition of that.

**Missing documents** is another critical issue that impedes receipt of pensions and other state benefits they are entitled for. Missing military certificates of many refugee males prevents them from getting employment in Armenia (especially in armed forces). In addition, refugees are unaware of where to get reliable information. The impression from focus group discussions and key informant interviews was that the state and municipal bodies refugees interact with most, don't have adequate information around those legal processes and regulations. Lack of sufficient knowledge about existing legal regulations as well as document restoration among refugees triggers a sense of being neglected by the government and uncertainty about their future.

Refugees were suggesting **having a committee** representing their voice and protecting their rights, that would communicate state decisions and rules and where they could apply in case of any issue. Without a clear understanding of their legal status, protections and deriving rights and responsibilities, refugees may not fully integrate and feel themselves a part of the society.

*"It is said that if we get a refugee status, we will not be eligible for assistances anymore." Refugee in Nor Geghi village, Nor Hachn consolidated community.*

*"... being registered in Armenia in fact means to say goodbye to Artsakh (the popular name of the place of origin among Armenians)". Refugee in Nor Geghi village, Nor Hachn consolidated community.*

*"They didn't officially announce that Artsakh was dissolved so that we obtain Armenian citizenship. Our situation is vague, we don't know where we should sign or not." Refugee in Nor Gegh village, Nor Hachn consolidated community.*

The lack of clarity about their long-term legal standing may hinder refugees from making significant investments, such as buying property or building livelihoods, that would contribute to their stability and ability to generate income.

*"If we accept the citizenship of RA, how can we defend our rights then? How can we receive the compensation for our properties that we left home. For example, I paid AMD 15mln to buy a house in Stepanakert and have all the documents. Now if I become a citizen here, how that issue is going to be solved?" Refugee in Vardenis, Vardenis consolidated community.*

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<sup>4</sup> [Official News - The Government of the Republic of Armenia](#)

## Social integration and human capital

Social integration and inclusion are important components to foster social cohesion, reduce tensions and build trust within communities. Refugees can become valuable contributors to the economy through their skills, labour, entrepreneurship, and innovation. This can lead to economic growth and prosperity for both the refugees and the host community.

Social integration plays a crucial role in enhancing refugees' human capital by facilitating skill development, labour market participation, entrepreneurship, access to healthcare and social services, and cultural exchange.

According to the World Bank (WB) report on Human Capital in Armenia<sup>5</sup>, strong human capital is not only essential for greater productivity and long-term growth, but also helps build resilience to crises and shocks. WB suggests boosting inclusion through a greater focus on the poor and vulnerable and on lagging regions would bring better human capital for all.

Social integration is a complex process entailing different components, such as communication, building relationships, social cohesion, etc.

Focus group discussions showed that local population in all communities and settlements was welcoming and supportive. They are trying to provide refugees anything they are missing including the household supplies, kitchen utensils, clothes, food, etc. There were cases when local people provided their houses for free to refugees during first days of displacement.

*"To be honest, I am very glad that I am in this community. Everyone helped me and was welcoming." Refugee in Sisian, Sisian consolidated community.*

*"People from NK were forced to leave their home and move here. We welcomed them. For example, there are children in our school, and the schoolchildren were so welcoming, so they don't want to leave for another community". Local in Metsavan village, Tashir consolidated community.*

A communication gap existed between refugees and the local population in both urban and rural areas. Specifically, refugees often refrain from actively engaging with residents, leading to a missed opportunity for building relationships. In many cases the refugees living in the same settlement didn't know each other and met for the first time during the focus group discussions.

*"Cooperation with the locals or working together is just a matter of time. Even we as refugees do not know each other yet." Refugee in Gugark village, Vanadzor consolidated community.*

One of the mentioned reasons of less communication was cold weather because of what people spend more time indoors than outdoors. The limited interaction between groups is a barrier for information circulation and doesn't contribute to the creation of community cohesion.

Based on key informant interviews, the social cohesion in communities is fragile for several reasons. After the influx of refugees to Armenia, all the efforts of humanitarian actors were directed to provision of assistance to refugee population. This raises concerns among local population, who have the perception that refugees get more assistance than needed, whereas the local vulnerable people also have lack of food especially considering the winter season. Another reason of putting

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<sup>5</sup> [World Bank Document](#)

the social cohesion at risk, is that sometimes employers prioritize refugees over local people and set different hiring requirements for the two groups.

Based on FGDs, local people and refugees are ready to cooperate. This was also confirmed by key informants. However, there were not many opportunities for them to interact.

The positive side is that in rural areas with a prevailing number of elderly people, the inflow of refugees provides the villages/ communities with new opportunities for renewing cultural and socio-economic activities. The founder of “Munk” technological school is in Tashir community where it resumed its operations providing technological education to local children who were devoid of this type of service. The community in turn provided an area for free to the school to operate.

Consolidation efforts are needed to build the social integration and mitigate the risks for tensions in communities.

### **Current living conditions, housing and intentions**

Based on official sources, 12,618 refugees (11%) have left Armenia via air or land borders during the period of September 19, 2023, and January 5, 2024. In the same period 5,473 persons returned to Armenia and 7,145 persons didn't.

Refugee movements from one region to another were observed. As of October 1, the highest number of refugees settled in Yerevan (42,347), Syunik (14,305) and Kotayk (8,458) regions<sup>6</sup>. On October 5, the highest numbers<sup>7</sup> were registered in Yerevan (24,073), Kotayk (22,150) and Ararat (18,234) regions, showing the concentration of refugees in central regions. Since then, the numbers per regions have not changed drastically.

Many refugees intend to stay in Armenia at least throughout the winter. According to municipality representatives, refugees prefer to go to those communities and regions where different types of assistances are distributed. This causes a big flow of refugees among communities and regions of Armenia and makes it difficult to control their flow. Other factors influencing refugees' decision to stay in a particular place are:

- Having relatives there who are considered a social capital for them;
- As a result of displacement in 2020 temporarily living in and being already familiar with that community/settlement and having acquaintances there;
- Not being a bordering area, as refugees avoid living in such places;
- Comparatively lower house rents and affordable living;
- Being closer to Yerevan which ensures access to diverse employment opportunities and infrastructure.

*“If the government wants to give us money to buy a house in a village, why don't they let us buy it wherever we want but impose to buy in a bordering village? We were living with fear in our hearts and now they want us to live in bordering areas again?” Refugees in Arzakan village, Charentsavan consolidated community.*

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<sup>6</sup> State Migration and Citizenship service, 2023

<sup>7</sup> Prime Minister's office

In some cases, refugees mentioned difficulties in adapting to weather conditions as the weather is more severe in Armenia. Due to adverse weather conditions the utility bills are higher which disrupts their limited resources.

Refugees mentioned **houses** and **adequate employment opportunities** as the crucial factors influencing their decision to stay or leave the country/region.

*"... first of all, one needs to have a roof upon their head, and afterwards the issue of land arises, but we can ask for someone to rent and do something for our living." Refugee in Noyakert village, Ararat consolidated community*

Many refugees mentioned having no property in Armenia. Additionally, many of them rent a house or apartment to live in. While house rents in the areas near Yerevan are described as expensive many refugees continue to stay and rent those to avoid moving to bordering regions. Though more than half of refugee population mentioned having cooking utensils and food storage facilities, which belongs to landlords.

*"... of course, the main issue is to be able to obtain our own property in Armenia. The most essential thing is a house. Anyone of these people will stay in Armenia if they have their own houses." Refugee in Arzakan village, Charentsavan consolidated community.*

It was hard for refugees to speak about their future and longer-term integration plans as their basic needs including household supplies, kitchen utensils, heating issues, etc. were not addressed. Some of them were spending their savings to address those primary needs to have at least basic amenities. **Because of their psychological state they were mostly speaking about the problems and difficulties they were facing rather than looking for solutions.**

*"I spent all the golden jewellery we had to be able to live here." Refugee in Ranchpar village, Masis consolidated community.*

*"I want to stay here. I have six children and if I am given land I will build a house, establish my farm like I did in NK. If given land I will stay in Martuni." Refugee in Martuni, Martuni consolidated community*

According to key informants those who have different vulnerabilities and less opportunities settle in rural areas.

Refugees see the government as the key actor addressing their needs, for example in building houses and creating employment opportunities for them.

Refugees and key informants were suggesting building a town for them where they could live together, speak their dialect, and preserve their traditions and identity.

*"Armenians from NK have different characteristics. If they want us to stay and live here they need to establish a certain area where all NK Armenians could live together. Otherwise, being dispersed across whole Armenia we will lose our traditions, customs and miss the opportunity of helping each other – a distinctive feature of us." Refugee in Nor Geghi village, Nor Hachn consolidated community.*

*"These people have special traditions and habits, and they shouldn't be allowed to be assimilated and lost as our unique national type. I would suggest creating a settlement - a city, a village, where people can be together, live together, speak their dialect and keep their traditions. ... people shouldn't lose their identity." Key informant in Sevan.*



## Services and access to information

To solve the primary and most important problems, the one-time monetary support program of 100,000 AMD for each family member was implemented. At the same time, the AMD 40,000+10,000 6-month financial assistance was provided to cover apartment rent and utility costs. It should also be noted that also refugees who already had apartments in the Republic of Armenia became the beneficiaries of the AMD 100,000 per person state assistance <sup>8</sup>.

On 16 January, the MLSA announced the launch of a new program of state support for ensuring employment for people displaced<sup>9</sup>. The program consists of three components: a) professional training and employment, b) gaining work experience and job placement, c) professional training, gaining work experience and employment.

According to refugees, bureaucratic processes in Armenia are more cumbersome, provision of solutions take longer than was the case in their place of origin. In case of application to state bodies for obtaining or restoration of documentation or other issues they have to go through a number of cabinets or sometimes ministries which they describe as a frustrating and costly process. To be eligible for certain jobs (i.e., nurse in a hospital) they need to undergo a certain qualification process to have a relevant certificate which creates extra obstacles to access employment.

*"I was an official too in NK. When a citizen came to us with an issue, we provided a solution immediately. Here everything is electronic and digitalized. But in applications there is no editing option. If something is filled in wrong, it takes the system a long time to allow to edit or fill again." Refugee in Nor Geghi village, Nor Hachn consolidated community.*

Additionally, the refugee population is unfamiliar with using online tools and systems, a prerequisite for accessing state social assistances they are eligible for. This situation slows down the process of receiving state assistance which engenders a sense of being deceived and results in mistrust towards the government and country.

Community based services were mostly described accessible from refugees' perspective. All children at school age had access to schools. However, acceptance of new schoolchildren in some communities overwhelmed schools resulting in more students in a class than is allowed which may compromise the quality of education.

In some communities' access to pre-school education is limited conditioned with a lack of appropriate buildings and facilities resulting in longer waiting lists of enrolled children. This issue is faced by both local and refugee population.

However, lack of public transport in some communities failing to connect rural and urban settlements also hinders rural kids to access different clubs or services operating in urban areas.

Refugees receive healthcare services with the same conditions as locals. They were satisfied with the quality and accessibility of healthcare services.

<sup>8</sup> [Programs aimed at providing employment and housing for our compatriots](#)

<sup>9</sup> [ՀՀ աշխատանքի և սոցիալական հարցերի նախարարություն \(mlsa.am\)](#)

Municipalities everywhere have one or more designated people who are committed to addressing different issues of refugee population applying to them. There is a registration system where they document demographic information, their professions and specializations and needs based on what distribute assistances. The issues refugees request support for are diverse starting from asking for a support in obtaining household supplies up to requesting a job. However, **in many cases local authorities do not have legal mechanisms to address all the needs of refugees**. As it was mentioned by key informants the personality of a mayor or respective local authority representative is crucial in terms of solving problems and mobilizing local resources.

The designated person of municipality maintains constant communication with refugees. The latter informs them about available assistances, refers to respective services in the community. Social Media pages of municipalities serve as the main channels for information dissemination.

Additionally, municipality facilitates the demand and supply of labor in the recently expanded labor market by collecting information about existing vacancies in the local organizations and companies and suggesting those to refugees according to their qualifications and expertise. Information dissemination occurs through social media platforms, hanging announcements on the municipality walls and word of mouth.

### **Employment opportunities and economic integration**

According to the Statistical Committee of Armenia (Armstat), the employment-to-population ratio in Armenia was 50.9 percent in 2022 and the unemployment rate was 13.5 percent<sup>10</sup>. Compared to January-December 2022 the economic activity increased in January-December 2023 comprising 109.4 percent. Since the end of February 2022 there was a huge influx of Russians as well as Russian capital to Armenia. As a result, economic activity levels in Armenia have improved since the beginning of the year by 13.9 percent.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022 in Armenia increased compared to 2021 (112.6%) comprising AMD 8,501,435.5mln. Agriculture contributed around 10.36 percent to the GDP of Armenia, 25.56 percent came from the industry and 55.27 percent from the services sector.

The structure of economy is different from region to region. Main sectors of economy and livelihood sources in targeted regions are presented below<sup>11</sup>.

In **Ararat** region, agriculture is the main livelihood source, which mainly specializes in viticulture, fruit growing and vegetable growing. The leading trends of industry are manufacture of food products of drinks as well as manufacture of basic metals and other non-metallic mineral products. According to the key informant Ararat consolidated community includes 1 urban and 11 rural settlements.

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<sup>10</sup> [Armenia \(armstat.am\)](http://armstat.am)

<sup>11</sup> [Marzes of the Republic of Armenia and Yerevan city in figures, 2023 / Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia \(armstat.am\)](#)

Therefore, agriculture is considered a popular livelihood source. **Grapes, tomatoes, eggplant** are widely grown fruits-vegetables in the area. Though not being widespread, greenhouses may be another livelihood source for the people living in this area.

Food processing factories namely **canning** and **semi-finished food factories** operating in the area provide considerable job opportunities.

Speaking about metallurgy in the community the key informant indicated **cement** and **gold factories** that ensure employment opportunities for the locals as well. A new **scrap metal recycling factory** is being built in the community that has created employment opportunities for 200-250 people working on the **construction**. Specialists from Ararat are planned to be hired in the factory when it starts its operations to address existing unemployment and social issues in the community.

**Textile** company is another sphere where approximately 50 locals work. It could be expanded in case of investments.

**Public sector** namely educational establishments as well as armed forces is considered a major sphere for employment in the community. There are 18 schools, 11 pre-school educational establishments where citizens work.

**Service sector** and other private entities were also mentioned by the key informant as employment generating opportunity.

Table 3: Livelihood sources and proposed areas for employment as per key informants

Location	Livelihood sources	Proposed areas for employment opportunities
Artashat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture as the primary livelihood source.</li> <li>• The precondition for agricultural activities in the community are fertile soils and favourable climate.</li> <li>• Orchards and big greenhouse economies are popular in the area. Mostly flowers are grown there.</li> <li>• There are food processing factories such as Artfood and Proshyan canning factories.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bakeries, production of pastries and macaroni</li> <li>• Establishment of greenhouses</li> <li>• Establishing intensive gardens</li> <li>• Establishing manufacturing factories</li> </ul>
Masis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A considerable part of labor force in the community is concentrated in International Masis tobacco – tobacco production.</li> <li>• Fish farming, greenhouse economy and horticulture are developed in the community as well. With the development of fish farming also other spheres such as production of canned fish and frozen fish is developing.</li> <li>• Tomatoes, cucumbers, potatoes and greens are prevailing vegetables grown in this area. In greenhouses flowers, tomatoes, cucumbers are grown.</li> <li>• Masis is rich with sand and provides it to other regions as construction material.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of carpeting</li> <li>• Establishing canning factories (food processing)</li> <li>• Establishing youth center</li> </ul>

In **Gegharkunik** region, the leading branch of economy is agriculture, particularly production of grain, potato, vegetable and animal husbandry product. The region is the main supplier of fresh fish in Armenia. In recent years, there has been a trend of increasing fish stocks in the lake and an increase in stocks of valuable fish species. Mining industry is the main trend of industry of the region. Manufacturing is also of great importance, in which the following branches of industry have bigger share: machinery, building materials and food industry.

Table 4: Livelihood sources and proposed areas for employment as per key informants and local population

<b>Location</b>	<b>Livelihood sources</b>	<b>Proposed areas for employment opportunities</b>
<b>Martuni (ARM)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>80 percent of the citizens in their region finding their employment abroad indicating heavy dependence of the families on remittances.</li> <li>There are food processing factories in the community stated by the key informant, specifically canning factories, dairy production, bakeries. However, these are small-scale, and the number of created job opportunities do not exceed 30 in each.</li> <li>Textile production is also popular yet limited.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing canning factories (food processing)</li> <li>Establishing intensive gardens (pear)</li> <li>Textile production</li> <li>Dairy production</li> <li>Fridge economy</li> <li>Production of berries</li> <li>Smart barns</li> <li>Cattle breeding</li> </ul>
<b>Vardenis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is an acute issue of unemployment in the community.</li> <li>Agriculture, education and manufacturing were three main employment spheres.</li> <li>Women in the community find employment mostly in public sector, schools, kindergartens, and musical schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carpeting</li> <li>Wool processing</li> <li>Furniture factory</li> <li>Animal husbandry</li> </ul>
<b>Sevan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public sector, trade and service sectors are the main sources for employment. In rural areas horticulture and animal husbandry are more developed and prevalent.</li> <li>Fishing is seasonal and is more active in summer months. However, there are no big fishing enterprises in the community according to the key informant.</li> <li>Tourism thrives mostly in summer months in Sevan. On the other hand, in many rural areas of the community guest houses proliferate which enables agricultural production and creates more employment opportunities in villages.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Textile production</li> </ul>

In **Lori** region, the leading branches of economy are agriculture and industry. Tourism is also developed in the region. Production of grain, potato, vegetable, and animal husbandry product is developed in agriculture. Main trends of industry are mine industry and manufacturing industry.

Table 5: Livelihood sources and proposed areas for employment as per key informants and local population

	<b>Livelihood sources</b>	<b>Proposed areas for employment opportunities</b>
<b>Vanadzor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being a regional centre, there is a number of state institutions that create employment opportunities in the community.</li> <li>• Besides, there are 2 textile factories in Vanadzor (Gloria and Itex) where most of the working people are employed.</li> <li>• Tourism is considered a flourishing area as well.</li> <li>• There is a technological centre in Vanadzor with more than thousand workplaces.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of carpeting</li> <li>• Development of textile production</li> <li>• Training of cooks</li> <li>• Development of tourism</li> <li>• Establishing greenhouses</li> </ul>
<b>Tashir</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Tashir more than half of the local population go to work abroad.</li> <li>• Agriculture is a fundamental livelihood source in the community as well.</li> <li>• Dairy production is a popular livelihood source in the area.</li> <li>• Alashkert Group, Milk of Lori, Tashir Milk are cheesemaking factories operating in Tashir.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of carpeting</li> <li>• Establishment of greenhouses</li> <li>• Development of cattle breeding</li> </ul>

**Kotayk** region has multi-branch economy. The main branch of economy is industry. The region plays an exclusive role, particularly, in the energy field. The manufacturing industry includes production of food and beverages (processing and canning of meat and meat products, processing and canning of fruits and vegetables, production of dairy products, flour, beverages, production of tobacco products); production of other types of non-metallic mineral products (production of glass and glass products, production of cement); production of basic metals (production of cast iron, steel and ferroalloys), and production of jewelry products. The main branch of region agriculture is poultry farming. There are 3 large battery farms in the territory of the region.

Table 6: Livelihood sources and proposed areas for employment as per key informants and local population

	<b>Livelihood sources</b>	<b>Proposed areas for employment opportunities</b>
<b>Charentsavan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public sector is considered the main livelihood source in the community.</li> <li>• Metal casting factories, textile production and canning factories are the main employment areas for the local population.</li> <li>• Bakeries, pastry production are popular in the community.</li> <li>• Agriculture is developed in the rural areas of Charentsavan consolidated community. There is strawberry, raspberry, blackberry fields in the area. Tomatoes, cucumbers, corn and linseed are grown in the area. Even linseed oil is produced.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing dairy production</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beekeeping and poultry farming is not developed but has potential too. There are smart barns in rural areas.</li> <li>• From animal husbandry pig breeding is popular.</li> <li>• In greenhouses flowers and mushrooms are grown.</li> <li>• Arzakan village, included in Charentavan consolidated community, is a famous touristic destination with many hotels and resorts that ensure employment opportunities for locals.</li> <li>• Besides, in warmer seasons construction works commence which entails opening of new job opportunities.</li> <li>• There is a technological center in Vanadzor with more than thousand workplaces.</li> </ul>	
Hrazdan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public sector is the primary sphere where local people are employed.</li> <li>• Textile production, greenhouses and blue-collar jobs are prevailing areas for employment in the community as per the key informant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of agriculture</li> <li>• Development of construction</li> </ul>
Nor Hachn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A big number of local people is employed in public sector.</li> <li>• There are poultry farms in the community as well.</li> <li>• Diamond processing is gradually developing in Nor Hachn.</li> </ul>	

In **Syunik** region, the developed branches of economy are industry and agriculture. Main branches of industry are mining industry and production of electric energy. The agriculture of Syunik is mainly specialized in plant growing (especially grains and potato growing) and livestock breeding (especially breeding of large and small cattle).

Table 7: Livelihood sources and proposed areas for employment as per key informants and local population

Location	Livelihood sources	Proposed areas for employment opportunities
Goris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture and tourism are the primary areas of economic development in Goris.</li> <li>• There are hotels and restaurants in the community that enable employment of many local people.</li> <li>• Goris region is famous for green bean production.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing food processing factories (canning, production of juices, pickled vegetables and fruits)</li> <li>• Wool processing and production of woolen threads</li> <li>• Processing and production of herbs</li> </ul>
Sisian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are 17 stone quarries, that create employment opportunities in the community.</li> <li>• Among food processing enterprises production of mineral waters and lemonade was mentioned (Tatni, Shake 1).</li> <li>• There are several dairy production factories in the area.</li> <li>• Construction is also considered employment providing sphere in the community.</li> <li>• Horticulture and animal husbandry are considered the main livelihood sources for the locals.</li> <li>• Potatoes, cabbage, wheat are the main crops in this area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textile production</li> </ul>

There are challenges identified during focus group discussions with local population and key informants that hamper various income generating endeavors of the locals in different spheres. Speaking about the challenges in agriculture the **lack of adequate irrigation systems** in the communities was mentioned everywhere. Even though remarkable investments are done to revitalize the irrigation systems the issue remains alarming. lands were not cultivated for a long time and became rocky with low fertility level. As local people mentioned in focus group discussions it is not profitable to cultivate them as extra measures are necessary to implement. The **higher prices of fertilizers** that augment production costs is another challenge in agriculture identified during FGDs and KIs.

Even though the government has different subsidy programs to assist the farmers, the **documentation submission process is heavy** and frustrating and requires a lot of efforts and time from the locals.

*“This year the government subsidized wheat production. Instead, they required so many documents from us for the subsidy that the wheat fell out of our nostrils...” Local in Vaghashen village.*

The loans, on the other hand are expensive to take and kick off a business. While other projects that provide financial assistance to start a business require investment from the beneficiary’s side whereas the latter often do not have those resources. This means that even though those projects exist they remain less accessible for people.

**Loss of pastures** was another issue that resulted in big cuts of livestock as well as price hikes of fodder in Gegharkunik and Syunik which made cattle breeding less profitable for the local people.

During the focus group discussions, **lack of knowledge and skills on doing business** was noted. According to the participants’ perception the government should subsidize production costs in agriculture (including seeds, fuel, renting agricultural equipment, etc.), as well as assist within the whole value chain including finding markets for the products or buying those products itself. Insufficient knowledge to establish business relations with other stakeholders makes them less competitive in the market<sup>12</sup>.

The lack **of agricultural equipment parks** is another issue revealed during the discussions that creates more challenges in farming and agriculture production.

*“The community does not have its own agricultural equipment. There are cooperatives in our area that have their own machinery and people have to rent those. But in busy season the prices of rent go really high or the queues for renting might be so long that some people will not even manage to do their works”. Key informant in Martuni consolidated community*

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<sup>12</sup> Previously the government of Armenia bought agricultural products for the army from the farmers (potato, cabbage, carrot, wheat, barley, etc.). Then the catering system in the army was changed and food provision is now done by a private entity which resulted in the loss of the main client for the local farmers – the state. The same was in refugees’ region of origin. That’s why they continue to consider the state as the main buyer and can’t yet adapt to new conditions. Also, this is a result of a typical Soviet thinking. Also, there were state projects aiming at resettlement of certain areas in the region which implied many privileges and assistances for the citizens. This might be a reason for high dependency and expectations from the state/government.

**Finding potential markets for selling agricultural products** was another issue identified during KIIs and FGDs. According to the discussions higher expenditures of local production is the core reason for the local products to be less competitive in regional and global markets. For example, in Russia the price of potato dropped making Armenian potato less competitive for Russian buyers. Imported cheaper Russian flour creates sales issues for the Armenian wheat which is relatively more expensive.

*“There is a serious sales issue in whole Armenia. Only the big actors in the market can afford sending their trucks to Lars and in case of having production losses continue operating.” Locals in Mkhchyan village, Artashat consolidated community.*

The local food production was used to cover food needs of the army but now bigger producers pushed small farmers out from the competition.

The region used to import potatoes from Armenia. The farmers in Vardenis are now facing serious difficulties in finding new markets and suffer big production losses.

The market of agricultural products in Yerevan has limited spaces for each region. As a result, only a few people can permanently rent stall spaces and resell products of farmers.

Overall, there was an impression that the value chain of different agricultural products in the regions of Armenia is disrupted and there is a lack of regulations in this sphere.

### **Barriers for refugees to integrate into labor market and engage in agriculture**

Currently the main livelihood sources for most of the refugees are **state social assistances, their savings as well as random daily job opportunities**. As refugees mentioned, they were depleting their savings to meet their basic housing and winterization needs, such as buying kitchen utensils, basic furniture, fuel for heating, etc.

The main income sources previously were employment in military service, state bodies, service sector, trade and agriculture. Also retired military servants were entitled for military pension which was considerably higher than in Armenia. People who were employed in any public or private entity were also engaged in either horticulture or animal husbandry which was sometimes their secondary source of income. Most of the men were engaged in military service. This is challenging their attitude and opportunities to engage in other types of income generating activities. On the other hand, women appear to be more open and committed to obtain new skills contributing to their livelihood.

The majority of refugees are motivated to work and engage in income-generating activities. They have identified potential opportunities in hosting communities and see what they can do based on their experience and skills. Agriculture is the primary area where refugees think they can be engaged in. There are cases when people among refugee population had a chance to continue their career in private and state sectors (they were hired as teachers, music teachers in schools, nurses in hospitals, drivers etc.), as well as earn their living as taxi drivers in bigger cities of the country. Additionally, there are established refugee – owned businesses in the communities such as bakeries, production of traditional, local bread with greens and pastry.

However, there are barriers hindering them to start their employment or self-employment.



One of the barriers refugees are facing is **inaccessibility of financial services** in Armenia. Financial institutions refuse to give them loans because of incomplete documents and lack of sustainable income. This situation hinders refugees to obtain assets that would help them start income-generating activities. During the discussions refugees were expressing willingness to be engaged in different agricultural activities. However, they were pointing out lack of financial resources to do investments and highlighting the **need of various assistances** to support them obtain those necessary assets. What's more, among refugees a few were able to bring tools and equipment into Armenia. For example, a jeweler and a welder, were among those who were facing a barrier of **not having tools** that would ensure self-employment opportunities for them. There were also nail artists and hairdressers who were unable to bring their tools either. Lack of financial resources and inaccessibility of alternative funds exacerbates the situation.

The next barrier for refugees to do investments and start income-generating activities is **uncertainty** and previous experiences of displacement. There were families who were displaced more than once and went through hard times losing their properties. As they described during discussions, they abandoned their houses and came to Armenia empty-handed. Now they don't feel secure to do investments again as are afraid of displacement and losses.

Most of the refugees didn't have any property in Armenia including land. Yet most of them identified land as one of the prerequisites for them to stay in host communities.

*"Let's assume I stay in this community. Are there lands available in this community? Is there someone who is going to buy those lands for us? Are they going to sell those lands or not? Are they available for us to rent?"  
Refugee in Noyakert village, Ararat consolidated community.*

Lands in Armenia are predominantly privatized. In case there are free lands that the refugees would like to buy they will have to participate in an auction. On the other hand, in Armenia **land plots are fragmented** and small, while rural population in the region had access to cultivate bigger land plots to lower production costs due to economic scale effect. This implies that in case refugees want to rent lands, they will have to approach several owners to consolidate rented lands. However, rented houses with adjacent land, might provide an opportunity to grow plants that would at least ensure food for their own consumption.

Another barrier to start agricultural works in Armenia raised by the refugees is the risk of **doing investments in rented land that might then be taken back by the owner.**

**Climate and soil quality** in refugees' place of origin were more favorable for agriculture. Harvesting of certain products took place more than once in a year in the region, while in many parts of Armenia, main harvest is in autumn. Refugees used to have greenhouses, cultivate huge fields of watermelon, pomegranate as well as grow crops (wheat) and other fruits and vegetables. Animal husbandry such as pig, sheep and cattle breeding were popular as well. Apiculture was also widespread. Due to favorable weather conditions in the region and availability of pastures livestock was mostly outside in all seasons within a year which means people didn't have to invest significant resources in animal husbandry (for example buy fodder). In Armenia, they will have to understand the profitability of

animal husbandry calculating the price of fodder for the livestock during colder months and market prices of meat and milk. This requires additional knowledge and skills.

However, most of the refugees consider agricultural works seasonal and unstable source of income. According to them there should be employment opportunity in public or private sector which should be a primary source of income. Speaking about employment sectors refugees mostly mention public sector. State is perceived as number one employer for both refugees and local people.

After their arrival into Armenia refugees were engaged in **daily working opportunities** in construction and gardens during harvesting season. According to their perceptions employment opportunities are much scarcer in rural rather than urban areas. In search of jobs in the nearby urban areas refugees often face transport issues. **Lack of public transport** linking different parts of a town or various settlements of the same community is a barrier to access job opportunities for refugees. They have to either take a taxi which they can't afford or give up potential employment opportunities.

One of the most striking barriers for refugees to be engaged in income generating activities are **lower wages in Armenia** compared to their place of origin. This was the core reason for refugees to reject employment opportunities, whilst also pinpointing their disproportionately higher expenditures (especially high rents and utilities).

*"The government gives us 50,000 AMD now, but in 6 months it will stop. Where should we work to afford to pay the rents and also live." Refugee in Vardenis, Vardenis consolidated community.*

*"Salaries here are not higher than 200-250,000 AMD. It is not competitive for us, because we have to pay rents which are very high, address our basic needs and also live with that ..." Refugee in Nor Geghi, Nor Hachn consolidated community.*

Refugees were indicating proliferation of Indian economic migrants, as a reason that lowers the wages and salaries in certain spheres in Armenia. However, their complaint about lower salaries sometimes seems offensive for locals who agree to these working conditions even if they express a sense of being underpaid.

Another barrier identified during the discussions was **documentation issues**. Missing military certificates of many refugee males prevents them from getting employment in Armenia (especially in armed forces). To be eligible for applying for different job opportunities refugees have to be registered in Armenia. Yet, the majority are unsure about the repercussions of registration, and as they do not register, they are being excluded from the local labor market. Additionally, there are established regulation processes for certain jobs in Armenia that require specific qualifications and a certificate to prove qualifications (i.e., nurses). These processes however create barriers for a group of refugees to smoothly step into the labor market. Another concern relates to being able to find a job after going through the certification process.

### Conclusions, recommendations and action points

The analysis shows that refugees face barriers for their social-economic integration. Main barriers identified are mainly regarding the unclarity of legal status of displaced population and procedures for document acquisition, social cohesion, effective communication, employment opportunities and conditions, re-profiling and/or gaining new skillsets particularly in case of men.

As per key informants and local people raised the challenges related to the employment opportunities, lack/insufficiency of technical equipment for farming, irrigation systems, loss of pastures (in bordering areas) and functional food value chains (market).

Based on the study results it is evident that the efforts focused on social-economic integration should be institutional, which means that designed projects need to target the community development including local authorities, refugees, and local population.

Steps	Thematic sections	Barriers	Action points
1	Legal status and documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unclarity about legal status.</li> <li>• Lack of awareness about the procedures and processes for acquisition of documentation</li> <li>• Missing documents is another critical issue that impedes receipt of pensions and other state benefits they are entitled to.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equip local self-governance bodies with information and tools to work with refugees.</li> <li>• Refugees were suggesting <b>having a committee</b> representing their voice and protecting their rights, that would communicate state decisions and rules and where they could apply in case of any issue.</li> </ul>
2	Intensions and living conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refugees are uncertain about their future and maintain hope for a return to place of origin.</li> <li>• Refugees don't have real estate, land, livestock.</li> <li>• There is a lack of clarity regarding the legal status of refugees.</li> <li>• The costs of renting houses/apartments, utilities, and goods, especially in urban areas, are higher compared to home.</li> <li>• Refugees, who have savings, refraining from purchasing property, anticipating potential compensation from the government.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop community-based support programs tailored to the needs of refugees and the local population, fostering social cohesion and integration.</li> <li>• Provide housing support initiatives to alleviate financial burdens and facilitate stable residency for refugees, while not creating opportunity gaps between refugees and local populations.</li> <li>• Clarify to which extent the Armenian government or the former local authorities can be expected to compensate for lost properties there.</li> </ul>
3	Social Integration and human capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient communication among refugees and between refugees and locals impedes the social integration and mutual trust.</li> <li>• Tension arises among locals towards refugees due to the substantial assistance provided to the refugees, coupled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement cross-cultural communication initiatives to encourage interaction and understanding between refugees and local communities.</li> <li>• Integrate refugees in formal and non-formal structures fostering integration.</li> </ul>

	<p>with a perceived lack of support for vulnerable local residents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additionally, refugees' reluctance to accept proposed salaries, viewed as low by them, contributes to a sense among locals that they are being underpaid.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mitigate the risks for social cohesion, such as the effective coordination and inclusiveness of humanitarian assistance and development investments.</li> <li>• Enhance the communication between the authorities and refugees by establishing coordination committees consisting of local authority and refugees aiming at provision of information, referral, etc.</li> <li>• Clarify perceptions around salary levels and working conditions in Armenia, so refugees understand the importance of equal treatments.</li> <li>• Improve access to information by providing training and resources on using online tools and systems for state social assistance programs.</li> </ul>
<p>Employment Opportunities and Economic Integration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refugees primarily rely on provided assistance and personal savings for their livelihoods.</li> <li>• Due to higher salaries previously received in the Region of origin compared to those in Armenia, refugees are reluctant to accept proposed lower salaries.</li> <li>• Limited business knowledge poses challenges for refugees in identifying potential markets for their products.</li> <li>• Investing in agricultural activities in Armenia is hindered by the risk of using rented land that could potentially be reclaimed by the owner.</li> <li>• Most of the men were previously involved in military service as their main source of income, resulting in a limited range of skills and knowledge.</li> <li>• Refugees refrain from making investments, as they wait to see if the Government provides assistance for businesses, etc.</li> <li>• People in used to cultivate bigger land plots and due to scale effect in their place of origin, they could decrease production costs. Since in Armenia land plots are fragmented and private in case refugees want to rent those, they will have to approach several owners to obtain bigger plots.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish microfinance and subsidy programs tailored to the needs of refugees, providing financial assistance for entrepreneurial ventures and small businesses.</li> <li>• Design micro-finance programmes to fund businesses and enterprises newly established by refugees with reduced interest rates and taxes.</li> <li>• Develop initiatives to address land fragmentation and infrastructure issues, such as facilitating access to consolidated land plots for agricultural activities, installation of irrigation systems, greenhouses, etc. and ensure access for both refugees and locals.</li> <li>• Contribute to sustainable farming, by creating community- owned assets and services, such as the establishment of equipment parks, effective value chain actors, consultancy, etc.</li> <li>• Map the existing opportunities, projects, required workforce and the potential for refugees, and accordingly develop a systematic approach for employment and self-employment programs.</li> </ul>

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